



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

#### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 1950

#### MOTTLED DUCK STUDIES FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT CLUES

The mottled duck, a Texas and Louisiana relative of the black duck and the continent-spanning mallard, is being studied by U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state biologists to gain the facts needed for better management of the species, the Department of the Interior reports.

An important game duck for sportsmen in the coastal counties of Louisiana and Texas, the mottled duck sometimes furnishes the bulk of early shooting in this region — particularly in years when the fall flight of northern mallards is late in arriving. During the seasons of unusually heavy hunting, the mottled ducks suffer high losses, principally because the birds establish residence on ponds and marshes and are not dispersed by shooting.

To study methods which might be used to increase the mottled duck populations after seasons of intense hunting, and to plan better regulations to equalize the hunting pressure and still give hunters as much shooting as possible, Texas has received Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid funds for a coastal waterfowl survey. In addition, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists have been obtaining counts of these ducks in Louisiana by aerial surveys.

The mottled ducks of Louisiana and Texas resemble the black ducks that migrate into the same region every fall. Only experts can tell them apart. Some mottled ducks migrate to Mexico in the winter, but most stay in the area where they were raised. Hunters coming day after day during the season to the same pond — supposedly to hunt the migrating black ducks and other mallards — may kill all the local mottled ducks residents.

It has been observed that sporadic increases in mottled duck populations occur during a succession of very wet years. Ample water in the marshes during the rearing season cuts down predation — especially from land mammals like dogs, cats and raccoons — as well as illegal hunting.

The ducks, nesting on the ground around ponds and marshes, are susceptible to predation. Predators of the eggs and young include mammals like raccoons, skunks, foxes, mink, and opossums, and also "submarine" creatures like watersnakes, cottonmouths, large bass, alligator-gars, and snapping turtles. Despite these latter predators, the ducks benefit from increased water-areas because more breeding territory is provided, food is more abundant, and there is more space in which the young can maneuver.

X X X